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ILLINOIS AND MICHIGAN CANAL,  
FOX RIVER AQUEDUCT  
I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor  
Ottawa  
LaSalle County  
Illinois

HAER No. IL-46

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 37127  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
ILLINOIS AND MICHIGAN CANAL, FOX RIVER AQUEDUCT  
I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor

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HAER No. IL-46

Location: I & M Canal National Heritage Corridor  
I & M Canal crossing the Fox River  
Ottawa, LaSalle County, Illinois

UTM: 16 E.347060 N.4579280  
Quad: Ottawa

Date of Construction: ca. 1848, 1919

Builder: Unknown

Present Status: Abandoned

Significance: Part of the original timber frame aqueduct (built 1848) was incorporated into the bridge built by the Illinois Traction system in 1903; reconstruction of the original Fox River aqueduct was carried out in 1918 and 1919 as part of the improvements to the Rockdale-to-Peru section of the canal, the last operating stretch of the I & M.

Project Information: The Illinois and Michigan Canal was designated a National Heritage Corridor in 1984. The following year HABS/HAER embarked on an extensive inventory and documentation project of the 100 mile-long corridor. Field work for this project was concluded in 1988. Final editing of the documentation was completed in 1992.

Historians: Gray Fitzsimons and Douglas Kupel, 1985; Carolyn Brucken, 1992.

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The original aqueduct across the Fox River, completed about 1848, was constructed of six, wooden, Howe truss spans supporting a timber trough. The towpath extended along the south side of the aqueduct and consisted of timber trusses supporting a timber deck. In the 1870s steam powered canal boats superseded boats pulled by mule teams, and the towpath bridge subsequently fell into disrepair. However, the Illinois Traction System, completed from LaSalle-Peru to Marseilles in 1903, used the piers from the wooden towpath spans to create a railroad crossing over the Fox River (see entry of Illinois Traction System: Fox River Bridge). In addition, a highway bridge was built adjacent to the interurban bridge. The stone piers extending south from the piers of the old interurban bridge remain in place.

The timber superstructure and trough of the Fox River Aqueduct remained unaltered until 1918-19 when the federal government provided funds to improve the canal from Joliet to LaSalle-Peru, the last commercially operating section of the I & M Canal. All timber members of the remaining aqueducts were replaced with steel. Following the closing of the canal in 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps added brick, stone and concrete infill to the river piers and abutments to stabilize the structure. The interurban line ceased operation in 1934; the bridge has been abandoned since. The aqueduct and interurban spans are presently in poor condition. The limestone of the piers has greatly deteriorated and some of the concrete, added in the early 1900s, has spalled. The Illinois Department of Conservation has begun to rehabilitate the old interurban bridge for use as a pedestrian walkway.

The Fox River Aqueduct has rough-cut, regular-course limestone piers and abutments, capped with poured concrete. The aqueduct contains seven piers and two abutments supporting a superstructure consisting of a steel trough of riveted steel plate girders. Its total length is approximately 500'.

**SOURCES:**

"McKinley Syndicate Properties of Northern Illinois," Street Railway Review, v. 15, (March 15, 1905): 131-35.

U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of National Parks, Buildings and Reservations, State Park Emergency Conservation Work, Monthly Reports for year 1934, prepared by Theo. M. Kingsbury, Project Superintendent, (available on microfilm, Roll #3, I & M Canal State Park Archives, Morris, Illinois).

Mary Yeater Rathbun, The Illinois and Michigan Canal (State of Illinois, Department of Conservation, Division of Historic Sites, 1981): 35-7.